

IZMIR, Turkey (Reuters) – A U.S. pastor denied allegations of links to a group accused of orchestrating a failed military coup in Turkey on Monday as he went on trial in a case that has fueled strains in relations between Ankara and Washington.

"I do not accept the charges mentioned in the indictment. I was never involved in any illegal activities," Andrew Brunson, speaking in Turkish, told the court in the western Turkish province of Izmir.

He says Pray to Me and I shall accept your prayers. About repentance He says: Whoever has done a bad deed or has indulged in sin and then repents and asks for His forgiveness will find Allah most Forgiving and Merciful.

Amir al-Momeneen Ali (AS)

## World Leaders Urge Negotiation, Not Military Action on Syria

BEIJING (Dispatches) – World leaders have adhered to the call for de-escalation in war-torn Syria and political settlement, following the U.S.-led tripartite military attacks on alleged chemical weapons facilities in the nation.

The strikes, launched by the United States along with its allies Britain and France before daybreak Saturday, followed reports of suspected chemical weapons use in Douma district on the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus on April 7.

The Syrian government has strongly denied the allegation, calling for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to send a fact-finding mission for investigations. However, the three nations carried out the strike on the day the mission just arrived in Damascus.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Ruhani condemned the airstrikes over phone, agreeing that the "illegal action seriously damages the prospects for a political settlement" in the war-torn country, according to a Kremlin statement.

"Putin in particular stressed that if such actions, carried out in violation of the UN Charter, continue, it will inevitably lead to chaos in international relations," the statement said.

The Arab League, at the summit held in eastern Saudi city of Dhahran, also denounced the use of chemical weapons in any place, requiring an international inves-



A handout picture released by the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) on April 14, 2018, shows men waving the Syrian flag as they drive a motorcycle in a street in the Eastern Ghouta town of Douma after Syrian government forces entered the last militant bastion.

tigation in accordance with international regulations into any such case.

Jordanian King Abdullah II said the Syrian crisis should be resolved through political negotiation other than any military action which could escalate regional conflicts.

Iran's Foreign Ministry also condemned the joint strike, saying in a statement "this invasion is a clear violation of international regulations and undermining Syria's national sovereignty and integrity."

The political adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has praised Syria's air defenses for intercepting most of the missiles fired by the U.S. and its allies at the Arab country on Saturday.

Bouthaina Shaaban said in remarks published on the Lebanon-

based al-Mayadeen website that the victory marks the beginning of the end of the American empire.

"The breaking of their evil aggression is the beginning of the vanishing of their empire, which will be replaced by new forces which respects the humanity, sovereignty and safety of peoples," she said.

"The most important fact we should record here for Trump is that his missiles are not smart, not accurate – and that the Syrian air defenses have given the evidence that they are more smart and accurate than his missiles. He should be careful about his tweets," Shaaban said.

She was referring to Trump's tweet before the attack, warning Syria and allies to get ready for the

missiles and suggesting that the rockets would evade air defenses because they were "nice and new and smart."

Shaaban noted that the U.S.-led airstrikes had not intimidated the Syrians and instead sent covering Israeli scrambling into air raid shelters.

"Instead of the Syrian people going to shelters, they went to the rooftops to watch Syrian forces shoot down scores of Trump's missiles before they could reach their goals. This, while the settlers of the Zionist entity fled to their shelters."

Shaaban also rejected Pentagon chief Jim Mattis's allegations that installations linked to the production of chemical weapons had been bombed.

"The Center of Science and Research which provides knowledge to the best Syrian students every year was targeted," she wrote.

"Trump is destroying this institution, which has no connection to producing any weapons. This is the lie of war about chemical weapons that Trump created."

The Syrian official noted that the West and the Zionist regime aim to achieve "two things" in the region. "One is that there be no unity in the [Arab] nation. The other is that [the Arab nation] not arm itself with science and knowledge, the highest value for humans."

A large number of anti-war protesters have again held demonstrations in cities across the United States to condemn the U.S.-led airstrikes.

## Fresh Saudi Airstrikes Kill at Least 6 Civilians in Yemen



Yemenis check the damage in the aftermath of a Saudi airstrike in Sana'a, Yemen, March 8, 2018.

SANAA (Press TV) – At least six civilians have been killed and several others wounded when Saudi warplanes conducted multiple airstrikes against residential areas across war-ravaged Yemen as Saudi Arabia continues with its atrocious bombardment campaign against its impoverished neighbor.

Yemen's official Saba news agency, citing an unnamed military official on Monday, reported that at least two women and one man were killed after Saudi fighter jets pounded a residential area in Manakhah district of western province of Sana'a, adding that a child was also injured in the raid.

Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah satellite television network, however, raised the number of wounded to five people, excluding the child. It added that another child was wounded in a separate airstrike in Sa'fan district in the same province.

Meanwhile, Saba news agency, in another report, said that at least one child was killed and her mother and sister were injured after Saudi warplanes hit their house in Bakil al-Mir district in the northwestern province of Hajjah.

Additionally on Monday, at least two civilians lost their lives after

Saudi snipers mortally injured them in Manba border district in the northern province of Sa'ada, Saba further reported, citing an unnamed security official.

The Saudi aggression was launched in March 2015 in support of Yemen's former Riyadh-friendly government and against the country's Houthi Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration.

The offensive has, however, achieved neither of its goals despite the spending of billions of petrodollars and the enlisting of Saudi Arabia's regional and Western allies.

The Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights announced in a statement on March 25 that the Saudi-led war had left 600,000 civilians dead and injured during the past three years.

The United Nations says a record 22.2 million people are in need of food aid, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger. A high-ranking UN aid official recently warned against the "catastrophic" living conditions in Yemen, stating that there was a growing risk of famine and cholera there.

## Iraqi Forces Kill 22 Daesh Remnants in Nineveh

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraqi security forces have killed nearly two dozen members of the Daesh terrorist group during a clean-up operation in the country's northern province of Nineveh.

The government troops and allied fighters from Popular Mobilization Units are engaged in offensives to purge the entire war-ravaged country of the extremists.

Commander of Nineveh Liberation Operations Major General Najim Abdullah al-Jubouri said on Monday that security forces staged an ambush and killed 22 Daesh terrorists west of Mosul, located some 400 kilometers (250 miles) north of the capital Baghdad, after a tip-off that a group of terrorists had infiltrated into the area.

The development came only three days after Iraq's Interior Ministry announced in a statement that six Daesh members, including a woman, had been arrested in the same Iraqi province.

The statement noted that the extremists were all on the Iraqi Interior Ministry's list of wanted terrorists.

Two of them were captured in Abu Maria village near Tal Afar, located 63 kilometers west of Mosul, while the rest were nabbed in different parts of Mosul.

Last week, Iraqi security forces announced that more than 20 Daesh terrorists had been killed in several security operations west of Mosul.

On December 9, 2017, Iraq's

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the end of military operations against the Daesh terrorist group in the Arab country.

"Our forces are in complete control of the Iraqi-Syrian border and I therefore announce the end of the war against Daesh," Abadi told a conference in Baghdad then.

The Iraqi prime minister said on August 31 that Tal Afar and the entire Nineveh province had been purged of the Daesh terrorist group.

The recapture of Tal Afar was made possible with the help of the Iraqi army, Federal Police, Counter-Terrorism Service units, pro-government fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units, commonly known by the Arabic name

Hashd al-Sha'abi, and the Interior Ministry's elite rapid response forces, Abadi stated.

On July 10, Abadi formally declared victory over Daesh extremists in Mosul, which served as the terrorists' main urban stronghold in the conflict-ridden Arab country.

In the run-up to Mosul's liberation, Iraqi army soldiers and volunteer Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters had made sweeping gains against Daesh.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January 2017 after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19 last year.

Daesh began a terror campaign in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks.

## Lebanese PM:

## Hezbollah Still Committed to Political Settlement

BEIRUT (Dispatches) – Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri stressed Monday that Hezbollah is "still committed" to the political settlement that led to the election of Lebanese President Michel Aoun and the formation of his government.

Speaking to reporters on his way back from Saudi Arabia, where he attended the recently concluded Arab League Summit, Hariri claimed that Saudi Arabia is keen to see stability in Lebanon.

The Persian Gulf kingdom supports Lebanon politically and economically and Hezbollah is still committed to the political settlement, the prime minister claimed.

"In the next parliament, the sizes of blocs will be close and will not differ much," he added, reassuring that the ban on the travel of Persian Gulf tourists to Lebanon will be lifted after the elections in May.

The remarks by the Lebanese prime minister came as a leading U.S. daily revealed details of Saudi Arabia's degrading treatment of Hariri during his trip to Riyadh, where the Lebanese leader was coerced into reading a prepared resignation speech under condi-

tions similar to those of a captive.

Hariri abruptly declared his resignation from a then-unknown location in Saudi Arabia and from Saudi-owned television on November 4, accusing Iran and Hezbollah of interfering in the region and signaling that that was his reason to quit.

But Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who suspected early on that Hariri had resigned of his free will, refused to accept his resignation and demanded his return from Saudi Arabia first. Lebanese intelligence sources soon concluded that Hariri was under restrictions in Riyadh.

That drama ended when Hariri returned to Lebanon on November 22 — partially after a diplomatic intervention by France — and rescinded his resignation on December 5.

While some details had already emerged of the circumstances of Hariri's three-week stay in Saudi Arabia, more appeared in a Sunday report by The New York Times, which used information from "a dozen Western, Lebanese and regional officials and associates of Mr. Hariri" to draw a better picture of what happened to him in Riyadh.

## Zionist Regime Uses Stun Grenade Against Draft Protesters

WEST BANK (Dispatches) – Zionist troops have fired stun grenades and clashed violently with protesters rallying against conscription in the army.

The regime's authorities describe the protesters as "ultra-Orthodox extremists" who are against military draft, arguing that their so-called religious endeavors do the regime as much service.

Conscription is mandatory for both men and women in the occupied territories, which is in a continuous war with regional countries and clashes with Palestinians in the occupied territories.

"Several hundred ultra-Orthodox extremists" joined the rally outside an enlistment office

in al-Quds, The Jerusalem Post reported. The demonstration came after it became known that the military police sought to arrest a girl, who was being held in the office, it added.

"Police used stun grenades and water cannon against rioters," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP. A police statement said four officers were slightly injured in scuffles.

The protesters even object to reporting to the military. Previous rallies have seen scenes of exceptional violence, with the police tussling with the participants and dragging those blocking roads forcibly away.

The organizers vowed during one protest to "fight in every way the edict that has felled

thousands in the spiritual ruin" of the Israeli military.

Last month, "ultra-Orthodox" politicians threatened to leave the ranks of Zionist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition unless a law was passed preventing conservative youths from conscription.

The crisis was resolved with a compromise, in which Netanyahu promised to give coalition MPs freedom on how to vote on a future bill on draft exemptions.

Draft-dodging is not a new phenomenon in the Israeli-occupied territories whose occupation and settlement expansion policies are a cause for continuous conflict with Palestinians.